

Westmill Solar Co-operative Minutes of board meeting

Westmill Solar Board meeting Tuesday 28th July 2020, 15:00 – 18:00

Location: Zoom Conference Call (due to the Covid-19 pandemic)

Westmill Solar Directors:

Tom Parkinson (Chair), Martin Allman, Mark Luntley (WW Chair), Nina Alpey, Mairi Brookes. Andy Crawford, Angela Bryant

Westmill Wind Directors:

Ruth Conchie, Douglas Parr, Dr Alan Ruddell, Josh Brown, Aude Duquesne, Ryan Rushton

In attendance:

Belinda Bramley, Alastair Maxwell, Sam Parkinson (Ethex), Annette Heslop (Energy4All)

Agenda Item	Discussion, decisions and actions	Actions
<p>Welcome, Approval of Minutes and matters arising</p>	<p>TP welcomed those in attendance</p> <p>The minutes of Q2 2020 Board meeting were approved subject to edits.</p> <p>Conflicts of Interest: AC – Councilor for Vale of White Horse (VoWH) ML – Chair of Westmill Wind Co-op (WWC), Board member of Energy4All and REScoop NA – Director of Low Carbon Hub CIC TP – Co-op Energy, Mid Counties Co-op</p>	
<p>RINA report (inc. G59 connection update)</p>	<p>MA led with findings of the report.</p> <p>May has been an outstanding month in terms of generation (875,362 kWh)</p> <p>New FiT meter was installed and tested in March. Along with the accreditation reapproval from Ofgem completed in May.</p> <p>Evergreen Rabbit controls have completed their work to remove the rabbits and prevent them burrowing under the inverter stations.</p> <p>There was a single outage to one of the inverters for 25 mins but generation began again without the need for intervention from BSR.</p>	

	<p>The G59 connection for the site to the grid is being improved for a better connection and cleaner energy transmission in line with government guidelines. It has been agreed and the work will be carried out in conjunction with Westmill Wind very soon.</p> <p>Thermal imaging Drone survey will be taking place in a couple of weeks' time to check the productivity of the solar panels and identify possible maintenance needed. BSR to be the lead.</p> <p>ML noted that Westmill Winds Operations manager has fallen behind when it comes to updating its IT and software in the turbines. MA commented that BSR have been updating this regularly.</p> <p>MA still proceeding with the review of asset manager which has been partly parked due to COVID. TP, MA and Ethex to proceed with investigating potential alternative asset managers.</p>	<p>TP/MA/Ethex</p>
<p>Ethex report & Q2 accounts (inc. update on FiT, member interest payments & PPA transfer to Octopus)</p>	<p>AM took the board through the Ethex Report.</p> <p>There continues to be delay in FiT provision from Octopus for the last quarter. Octopus assure Ethex that funds will be received before end of July.</p> <p>Delay of funds from Octopus could lead to delay in distributing interest to shareholders. TP and Ethex to investigate contractual obligations with Octopus. The board agreed to keep an eye on Octopus energy's finances. As a precaution Ethex to look into other FiT providers.</p> <p>Contracted independent rates specialist has secured a reduction in the business rates for 2020 and a rebate for previously billed quarters is also expected to be provided</p> <p>Shareholder withdrawal requests. Board had no objections to the requests. Ethex to action withdrawal.</p> <p>A quick glance over the website traffic showed a drop in the number of people visiting the site than in 2019 Q2. Ethex stated that this could possibly be due to the increase in AGM emails and information being sent directly to members and so less need to check website.</p> <p>BB took over review of the Quarterly accounts</p> <p>Westmill is well ahead of budget. Income is 25% ahead of budget due to the increased quarterly generation.</p>	<p>TP/Ethex</p> <p>Ethex</p> <p>Ethex</p>

	<p>Operating costs slightly higher than expected due to increased rent and Evergreen Rabbit control.</p> <p>Expenses are slightly higher than last year due to higher business rates but Westmill to receive a rebate on that which will improve figure.</p> <p>Overheads less than last year due to AGM being held online.</p> <p>Annual Report has been filed to the FCA.</p> <p>Before the meeting AM had informed the directors that he would be leaving Ethex. TP thanked AM for all the work he had done and wished him all the best for the future.</p>	
<p>AGM survey feedback & de-brief</p>	<p>The feedback from the AGM was almost entirely positive.</p> <p>Majority of feedback suggested next AGMs to incorporate both the online and in-person functionality.</p> <p>Boards to begin discussing next year's AGM at October Board Meeting</p>	
<p>Community Funding update (inc. Community Grants scheme and Visitors Centre update)</p>	<p>NA gave a few highlights on Community Funding since the last board meeting</p> <p>Process for paying WeSET has been setup and sorted on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>The community grants pilot is ready to launch. Application deadline set 28 September. A volunteer panel of members will meet via Zoom in the week commencing 12 October to evaluate the applicants. Recommendations will be made to WSC Board at the October meeting.</p> <p>Email ready to go out to members along with other WSC partners and organisations accompanied with a press release.</p> <p>With the visitors centre, WeSET funding request for construction etc – Westmill contribution now much reduced because of MB and Aled Baths work in receiving a grant from UK Government. ≥£10k awaiting new budgets.</p> <p>MB led with update on Westmill Visitor Centre</p> <p>The retendering process with the groundwork specialists is currently on hold due to COVID but hoping for further clarity in the next week or so.</p>	

	<p>£45K has been obtained via the Government’s “shovel-ready” project fund. Claiming Leader funding into 2021 is also very promising meaning that timelines are looking improved with construction potentially starting in early 2021.</p> <p>MB has also investigated the implementation of EV charging points.</p> <p>TP asked the board as to whether everyone was in agreement around the payments being made to WeSET and Community Funding. The board agreed to proceed ahead.</p>	
<p>Strategy update</p>	<p>WSC’s underlying financial position is strong and the level of overperformance compared to the forecasts set out in the 2012 share offer document is increasing. This is partly because of the ‘over-performance’ in generation.</p> <p>The board discussed whether WSC should go out to members as to whether we should continue to increase member interest payments or put more of WSC surpluses to other uses.</p> <p>WSC could change the ratio of members’ interest to community funding from 85:15 to 80:20. The board all agreed that this new ratio should be investigated and put to members.</p> <p>Possible uses for the ‘additional investment reserves’ is a key area where we should be looking for input from members.</p> <p>The board discussed that should the Co-op wish to continue beyond the initial 25-year plan then discussions around lease and newer, younger membership must be strategized sooner rather than later.</p> <p>TP and NA proposed a sub group to look at the financial model for future possibilities and to get external legal /accounting advice to implement possible changes</p> <p>Also, a communication plan to involve some member representation in how WSC proceeds in the near future and beyond 25 years.</p>	<p>AC/Ethex</p> <p>AB/Ethex</p>
<p>AOB</p>	<p>New LCH Communities Directorship. Westmill has a vote at the LCH AGM on 17/10/20</p> <p>Co-op Energy Novation Agreement: Co-op Energy are winding down their operating supply business and transferring across to Octopus Energy. The agreement doesn’t change terms but the relationship going forward will be with Octopus.</p>	

	<p>Possibility of additional meeting between now and the next board meeting to engage other topics, such as an Autumn Member Event</p>	
Break	<p>The Westmill Solar board took a short break. Westmill Wind directors joined the call for the second half of the meeting.</p> <p>Westmill Wind and Solar boards all introduced themselves to one another.</p>	
Marketing/comms Review of WSC and WWF	<p>AB and RR led with their findings from the Westmill Wind and Solar comms review.</p> <p>AB and RR briefly shared their findings with the boards from their review and put forward to the board as to whether the boards agreed with their recommendations and timescales.</p> <p>AB and RR suggested a joint member survey for both Co-ops to obtain additional member data (e.g. Current energy provider). Also, the possibility of creating a joint landing entry website for WSC, WWF and WeSET.</p> <p>The board thanked both RR and AB for all the hard work they had put in to the paper.</p> <p>The board mentioned that it was important that if both Co-ops begin to go out increasingly to members with requests and involvement that all groups are aligned with one another.</p> <p>Due to the increased numbers on the call and the restricted time frame of the meeting RR and AB asked that any additional feedback via email before proceeding any further.</p>	
Update on discussions with Midcounties & Co-op Community Energy Innovation Partnership	<p>WSC had initial discussion with Midcounties on how both groups could combine their community funding. It has since developed into two strands: firstly, with Co-po Community Energy on how we can work more closely with them.</p> <p>The second, in terms of education and acquisition of a younger more involved membership to reinforce the idea of sustainability.</p> <p>Co-op Community Energy Innovation Partnership involves creating a meaningful and practical partnership with established community energy groups/practitioners from across the UK.</p> <p>First and foremost, the aim of these partnerships will be to develop new innovative measures to drive forward</p>	

	<p>community energy while increasing membership and participation resulting in more projects coming to fruition.</p> <p>Both boards were happy to proceed. ML, TP and JB to go back to both Midcounties and Co-op Energy to keep us posted on developments</p>	ML & TP
<p>Member benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trading dividends <p>Home energy audits</p>	<p>There is a desire from both co-ops to, as far as is possible within the energy system, to return surpluses with our members.</p> <p>Both sites export on to the grid network and as such the energy currently goes through an off-taker, which for both co-ops is Co-op Community Energy.</p> <p>Therefore, an opportunity has been identified for the co-ops to be able to offer a virtual dividend to members who are also customers of Co-op Community Energy on top of their investment return.</p> <p>TP, ML and JB asked the board for any feedback and in-principle Board approval to progress discussions.</p> <p>The board were supportive and JB, TP and ML to take board suggestions and key questions onto future discussions.</p> <p>Following on, LCH are offering a subsidized home energy survey. TP and ML thought something similar could be offered to Westmill members. Board were happy for ML and TP to continue the conversation.</p>	ML & TP
Project LEO update	<p>DP and MB led the update.</p> <p>The intent of Project LEO is to use new technology development to provide services to local communities that allow for both carbon reduction, through greater use of renewables, and to be fair and equitable costs within the community.</p> <p>Ability to trade locally with renewable power suppliers and deliver it to the local communities.</p> <p>Westmill has been asked to participate in the “Smart and Fair Neighborhood” trial. The hoped-for outcome is the ability to trade locally with local renewable energy sites and to deliver this power to local communities.</p> <p>Still at development and concept stage.</p> <p>Next steps –all Westmill groups have signed an MOU and committed to the support and development of this.</p>	

	Currently waiting on a project brief from LCH on how to take this forward.	
Extension of Westmill Wind lease and planning consents	<p>JB updated the boards on WWF progress with the extension of their lease.</p> <p>Have had discussions with council on some pre-application advice to see what sort of response was needed. WWF have also commissioned E4All to continue investigating requirements needed.</p> <p>Vale of White Horse council have a number of committees that are being pro-active during the "Climate Emergency". Would also be very welcoming of Westmill attending one of their online meetings.</p>	
	Board Meeting Closed at 18:00	